

Education Increases Referrals for Colorectal Cancer Screening from Family Physicians

In Ohio, an average of 6,422 (3,214 men and 3,208 women) new cases of colorectal cancer were diagnosed annually between 2002 and 2006. According to the 2008 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, only 51% of Ohioans aged 50 years and older reported having had a sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy within the past 5 years.

The Ohio Department of Health, the Ohio Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Cancer Society provided family physician practices with professional education and practice improvement initiatives to help them increase colorectal cancer screening among their age- and risk-appropriate patients. The resource used for this program was “How to Increase Colorectal Cancer Screening Rates in Practice: A Primary Care Clinician’s Evidence-Based Toolbox and Guide” prepared by Mona Sarfaty, M.D., Karen Peterson, Ph.D., and Richard Wender, M.D. on behalf of the National Colorectal Cancer Roundtable.

One key initiative was a workshop attended by multi-disciplinary staff from 11 family physician practices (seven in Year 1 and four in Year 2). Each office conducted a pre- and post-participation chart audit to see how many current patients were receiving appropriate colorectal cancer screening recommendations. The practices then participated in a day-and-a-half workshop, which included education and a moderator-led, hands-on workshop that enabled each practice to customize and streamline the process used in their office to improve their colorectal cancer screening recommendations.

Participants were evaluated immediately after the workshop and 1 year later. Findings immediately after the workshop indicated that:

- 98% were able to identify office-based factors that affect colorectal cancer screening rates.
- 96% were able to identify their role in improving screening rates within their practice.
- 96% will help develop an office protocol to improve colorectal cancer screening rates.
- 100% felt that the information presented was useful and practical.
- 96% believed that the toolkit was useful and materials provided were helpful.

The findings, 1 year after the workshop, for those who completed the entire program showed that:

- The practices saw a 16%–30% improvement in speaking with their patients about the importance of getting screened for colorectal cancer.
- All practices saw an increase in recommendations for colonoscopy, with one practice increasing their referral rate by 49%.
- When a fecal occult blood test (FOBT) card was returned with a positive result, 100% of the practice teams referred their patients to have a colonoscopy.
- Four out of five practices increased their number of results reported back from the gastroenterologist regarding their patient’s referral for colonoscopy.

The program will continue in the educational and evaluation phase for the Year 2 participants in the next year. Additionally, the Ohio Colorectal Cancer Coalition will use this program as a model for working with other physician practices across Ohio to increase colorectal cancer screening rates statewide.

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